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MAINTAINING AND RENEWING  
NATIVE LANGUAGES

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**Abstract**

This article reviews research on maintaining and renewing American Indian languages. A rationale is given for the importance of maintaining tribal languages in terms of Native students' cross-cultural understanding. Then Joshua Fishman's theoretical paradigm for reversing language shift is summarized and tribal and national language policies are reviewed. Early childhood, elementary, secondary, and tribal college native language efforts are described along with Navajo and Yup'ik examples of school-based native-language maintenance/renewal efforts. Based on the research of tribal native-language renewal efforts and current research on second language teaching, specific suggestions are given for maintaining and renewing native languages.

In 1992 Dr. Michael Krauss, President of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas and Director of the Alaska Native Language Center, testified before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. In his testimony, he estimated that in 1492 there were 300 or more native languages spoken in North America and that 190 of these 300 plus languages are still spoken or remembered by native North Americans. Of these 190 languages, 155 are found in the United States, but only about 20 are still spoken by people of all ages and thus fully vital. Even these few languages, including Navajo and Crow, are threatened as fewer and fewer children are learning them in the home. Many non-Indians and some Indians see no tragedy in the loss of these languages, but as this country becomes more

and more dominated by concern about crime and the breakdown of traditional families, many Indians and some non-Indians see the perpetuation of native languages as vital to their cultural integrity.

The reason for this is that in addition to speech, each language carries with it an unspoken network of cultural values. Although these values generally operate on a subliminal level, they are, nonetheless, a major force in the shaping of each person's self-awareness, identity, and interpersonal relationships (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). These values are psychological imperatives that help generate and maintain an individual's level of comfort and self-assurance and, consequently, success in life. In the normal course of events these values are absorbed along with one's mother tongue in the first years of life. For that reason, cultural values and mother tongue are so closely intertwined in public consciousness that they are often, but mistakenly, seen as inseparable. For the majority of young Natives today, culture and language have, in fact, been separated. As a result, most of these young people are trying "to walk in two worlds" with only one language. This is a far more complex and stressful undertaking than the "two worlds" metaphor would suggest (Henze & Vanett, 1993).

Across two cultures the preferred etiquette for behaving or communicating in a particular situation may be starkly different. Using the same language across the two cultures often poses a challenge to both sense and sensitivity (Platt, 1989). Giving young Natives the opportunity to keep or learn their tribal language offers them a strong antidote to the culture clash many of them are experiencing but cannot verbalize. If along with the language, they learn to recognize the hidden network of cultural values that permeates the language, they will add to the knowledge and skills required to "walk in two worlds." They will learn to recognize and cope with cross-cultural values that are often at odds and they will begin to adopt more comfortably the cultural value that is appropriate for a particular cultural situation (Tennant, 1993).

The revival and preservation of minority languages is not a hopeless cause. Successful efforts toward indigenous language renewal and maintenance are to be found around the world. Examples are the revival of Hebrew in Israel, French in Quebec, and Catalan in Spain (Fishman, 1991). Even in the United States, with its emphasis on conformity, small groups such as the Hutterites and Hasidic Jews have been able to maintain their languages and cultures. In this article, we will bring to bear experience from both international and local tribal efforts to describe "what works" in language renewal efforts.

It should be noted that in seeking to preserve their cultural heritage, tribes are not rejecting the importance of English-language instruction for their children. Littlebear, a Northern Cheyenne advocate for bilingual education, sees "our native languages nurturing our spirits and hearts and the English language as sustenance for our bodies" (1990, p. 8). In addition, the results of the latest U.S. Department of Education study of bilingual education programs show that native-language use in schools does not hurt children (Ramirez, 1992). Such research tends to use English-language standardized test scores as a measure of success. If such research also focused on objectives such as strengthening American Indian families, there can be little doubt that bilingual programs utilizing and developing native-language fluency produce superior results. This is supported by the findings in the Department of Education study that parents were most satisfied with having their students learn both English and their home language and wanted their children to stay in bilingual programs longer (Ramirez, 1992).

### **Joshua Fishman's Theoretical Paradigm**

Socio-linguist Joshua Fishman (1991) sees minority-language maintenance embedded in a more general attempt to maintain traditional cultures. He asks minority-language activists to "view local cultures (all local cultures, not only their own) as things of beauty, as encapsulations of human values which deserve to be fostered and assisted (not merely 'preserved' in a mummified sense)" (p. 33). Fishman works from three value positions: 1) The maintenance and renewal of native languages can be voluntary. 2) "Minority rights' need not interfere with 'majority rights.'" 3) "Bilingualism is a benefit for all" (pp. 82-84).

Fishman postulates a continuum of eight stages of language loss with stage eight being the closest to total extinction and stage one being the closest to dynamic survival. Partly as a result of years of concerted U.S. government language suppression, many American Indian tribes, such as the Salish and Kootenai in Montana, are in Fishman's eighth stage where only a few elders still speak the tribal languages. The languages of these tribes are on the verge of extinction. Other tribes are in stage seven where only adults beyond child-bearing age still speak the tribal language. In stage six, there is still some intergenerational use of languages in the homes. In stage five the language is still very alive and used in minority communities, and even on a voluntary basis in schools. According to Fishman, "Stages 8 to 5 constitute the minimum

context for reviving native languages. Language revitalization efforts at these stages can be done inexpensively and do not need the cooperation of the dominant group.

Stages four through one deal with giving the minority language a legal status, including minority-language use in schools, the workplace, and in government. Efforts to bring about such legal changes can evoke reactions from the majority population such as those of the "English-Only" movement (Crawford, 1992). In stage four, the minority language is required in elementary schools (here it is important to have it as a language of instruction rather than as a second language to be learned). In stage three, it is used among employees (but not by supervisors). In stage two, government offices use the language. Finally in stage one, higher levels of government use the language. Fishman shows through studies of various minority-language efforts worldwide how successful efforts to restore minority languages move the language from higher numbered stages to lower numbered stages with the most critical move being from stage five to four.

Fishman notes how the emphasis on individual rights in modern western democracies detracts from the recognition of minority group rights. He maintains the following:

The denial of cultural rights to minorities is as disruptive of the moral fabric of mainstream society as is the denial of civil rights. Civil rights, however, are focused on the individual, while cultural rights must focus on ethnocultural groups. Such groups have no recognized legal standing in many Western democracies where both establishment capitalist thought and anti-establishment Marxist thought prophesies (sic) the eclipse of culturally distinct formations and the arrival of a uniformized, all-inclusive 'modern proletarian' culture. (p. 70)

He defends the need to recognize "cultural democracy" as a part of general democracy and to see efforts to preserve and restore minority languages as societal reform efforts that can lead to the appreciation of the beauty and distinctiveness of other cultures as well as one's own. He also emphasizes that efforts to restore minority languages should be "facilitating and enabling" rather than "compulsory and punitive." Bilingualism should be viewed as life enriching and a bridge to other cultures. Fishman's position is echoed in

smaller studies such as Colin Baker's (1988) review of compulsory and voluntary efforts to revive Celtic languages in the British Isles.

Important factors Fishman finds in successful efforts to maintain minority languages include the need for sacrifice, self-help, self-regulation, and the establishment of boundaries for language use. He logically locates the key to minority-language preservation in the intergenerational transmission of the language in the home by families, not in government policies and laws. This thought is reinforced by Littlebear (1990) who emphasizes the importance of family involvement in these efforts. Fishman writes "The road to societal death is paved by language activity that is not focused on intergenerational continuity" (p. 91). He cautions against putting too much effort and reliance on native-language media, schools, and governmental efforts. Policies, such as those embodied in the Native American Language Act of 1990, and native-language radio stations can make a friendlier environment for minority languages, but they are no substitute for grass roots efforts focused on use of the language in homes.

Outside of homes, minority-language use in early childhood centers, such as the Maori and Hawaiian language nests (described later in this article), and in pre- and post-natal programs for young mothers is important. In the community, minority-language use can also take place in cooperative markets, employment centers, recreational centers, legal aid services, credit unions, and so forth. Fishman also points out the need for teachers who teach subject matter in the home language and who are tolerant and accepting of different dialects. Fishman asserts "it doesn't pay to force a written standard, much less a spoken one, on an adamantly unwilling or seriously ailing speech community" (p. 345). Lastly, social boundaries must be developed that give minority languages an exclusive role in traditional family and community social activities.

Fishman's central issue is also raised by Lily Wong Fillmore (1991) in her article "When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First." She expresses deep concern that an English-language emphasis in early childhood education will separate language-minority children from their parents. This separation leads to family breakdown (specifically parent-child communication problems) and identity problems for these students as they reach their trouble-filled teenage years. That breakdown has had disastrous consequences for American Indians who, for example, die from alcohol-related causes at a rate 4.3 times the national average (Indian Health Service, 1990). These tragic social costs have been recognized by Republicans and Democrats alike in the

family values debate during the 1992 presidential campaign and by all Americans in our concern about what is happening to our nation's youth.

### **Tribal, National, and International Policies**

In recognition of the positive values it embodies, native-language renewal has received support through policies, legislation, and pronouncements at the tribal, national, and international levels. In the last few years tribal governments have been acting to protect and preserve their languages. One of the first of these was the Northern Ute Tribe whose Tribal Business Committee passed resolution 84-96 in 1984 declaring,

the Ute language is a living and vital language that has the ability to match any other in the world for expressiveness and beauty. Our language is capable of lexical expansion into modern conceptual fields such as the field of politics, economics, mathematics and science.

Be it known that the Ute language shall be recognized as our first language, and the English language will be recognized as our second language. We assert that our students are fully capable of developing fluency in our mother tongue and the foreign English language and we further assert that a higher level of Ute mastery results in higher levels of English skills. (Northern Ute Tribe, 1985, p. 16)

The resolution also requires Ute language instruction from preschool through twelfth grade, encourages "pre-service training in Ute language theory and methodology for teachers," and requires three credits of inservice training in Ute language for teachers within one year of employment (Northern Ute Tribe, 1985, pp. 16-18).

Another tribal language policy passed by the Pascua Yaqui Tribal Council in 1984 holds that "Our ancient language is the foundation of our cultural and spiritual heritage" and declares that "all aspects of the educational process shall reflect the beauty of our Yaqui language, culture and values" (Pascua Yaqui Tribal Council, 1984, p. 1). The same year the Navajo, living on the nation's largest reservation, passed an education code that recognized the importance of the Navajo language (Navajo Division of Education, 1985).

Although tribal policy and support are critical factors in language maintenance or renewal, they cannot of themselves without comprehensive planing and broad cooperation ensure that a formal language program will be

successful. In 1974 the Coeur d'Alene tribe in Idaho commissioned the development of a modern writing system, language course, and dictionary for their language. These were completed the following year (Nicodemus, 1975). Today, twenty years later, the interest in the language remains strong. However, because there was no comprehensive program of implementation and because there are now so few adult speakers of the language, the renewal effort has been limited to elementary school children learning just a few words here and there.

The Pawnee Tribe in Oklahoma developed a similar language-teaching program in 1979 (McNiel & Tennant, 1979). Of the eleven speakers of Pawnee who contributed to the course, only one is alive today; the tribal office estimates that there are only five to ten speakers of the language still living. Occasional courses in Pawnee are offered by the tribal library. The number of attendees at the 1994 course ranged from 10-15. One participant noted that in spite of strong motivation it is difficult to learn even simple conversation "because there really is no one to talk to." Although it is theoretically possible for an individual to learn a nearly extinct language through private effort with the help of a well-planned, systematic approach (see Hinton, 1990), the number of people with the level of motivation and persistence needed to succeed in such an effort remains small.

At the national level, native-language maintenance received support from the passage of the Native American Languages Act, Title I of Public Law 101-477, in 1990. Congress noted in this Act that "the status of the cultures and languages of Native Americans is unique and the United States has the responsibility to act together with Native Americans to ensure the survival of these unique cultures and languages." The Act makes it the policy of the United States to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages" and recognized "the right of Indian tribes and other Native American governing bodies to use the Native American languages as a medium of instruction in all schools funded by the Secretary of the Interior." Furthermore, the Act declares that "the right of Native Americans to express themselves through the use of Native American languages shall not be restricted in any public proceeding, including publicly supported education programs.

In addition, the final report of the U.S. Secretary of Education's Indian Nations at Risk Task Force in 1991 set as one of its ten national goals the maintenance of native languages and cultures. The Task Force gathered testimony at seven regional public hearings and at the annual conference of the

National Indian Education Association, made 30 school site visits, and commissioned 21 papers from national experts on American Indian/Alaska Native education on subjects such as current conditions, funding, dropout prevention, curriculum, and other relevant areas of concern (see Cahape & Howley, 1992).

In the transmittal letter accompanying the Final Report, the Task Force's co-chairs, former Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell and former Alaska Commissioner of Education William G. Demmert, Jr., wrote:

The Task Force believes that a well-educated American Indian and Alaska Native citizenry and a renewal of the language and cultural base of the American Native community will strengthen self-determination and economic well-being and will allow the Native community to contribute to building a stronger nation--an America that can compete with other nations and contribute to the world's economies and cultures. (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991, p. iv)

The Task Force found that "schools that respect and support a student's language and culture are significantly more successful in educating those students" (p. 16). Overall, their final report gives strong support for linguistically and culturally appropriate education for American Indian and Alaska Native students and echoes the Native American Languages Act in calling for the maintenance and renewal of native languages and cultures.

The experience Canada has had with Indian reserves, residential schools, and assimilationist policies parallels recent U.S. experience. Public hearings held in 1992 by the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples brought forth concerns similar to those of U.S. Natives. There was a call for more aboriginal control of education; more aboriginal teachers; more native language, culture and history in schools; and for cross-cultural training and education programs (Royal Commission, 1992).

Worldwide, the survival of indigenous peoples and their cultures is a resurgent and compelling political issue. The breakup of the Soviet Union is one example of the strong claims minorities make for self-determination. Elsewhere, Kurds, Basques, and other indigenous groups demand independence. The continued poverty and social problems of these minority groups are linked to their political disempowerment and minority status. Minority children everywhere are filled with the idea through mass media and



schools that the dominant culture reflects the way things ought to be. But their elders remind native children of the reality that they are not and can never be white.

The United Nations recognized both the predicament and aspirations of indigenous minorities by declaring 1993 the International Year for the World's Indigenous People. The current policy of Indian self-determination in the United States, while not perfect, approaches the ideal of freedom and cultural democracy envisioned in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **Making Policies Reality**

The rhetoric from tribal, national, and international levels is great, but drawing from the Irish and other international experiences, American Indian tribal governments should be wary of tribal language requirements in schools without first establishing local parental support for such requirements. The grass-roots support for the Native American Languages Act in the United States is matched by the grass-roots support of Celtic languages in Great Britain and Ireland, but that support does not necessarily translate into support for compulsory native language instruction. The Navajos ran into this problem with their 1984 policies. At the White House Conference on Indian Education in 1992, Navajo president Peterson Zah noted,

We took it to the Tribal Council, promulgated new rules, and announced a new law. The wishes of the Navajo people were finally put into writing, a statement of principle that we can all support. However, the different kinds of schools that we had on the reservation didn't necessarily buy what the Navajo Nation government wanted the local school districts to do because those local districts had their allegiance to the state. They had their allegiance to the federal government. So, we now have a situation where we have a policy that is not in force. (1992, p. 397).

There is an urgent need for developing a comprehensive plan and broad community support, including that of local schools, before the base of spoken language becomes irretrievably lost. To assist in such a comprehensive effort, Brandt and Ayoungman (1989) offer a highly detailed but locally adaptable set of "Exercises for Language Planning" in an Appendix to their "practical

guide" for language renewal and maintenance. The exercises include twelve activities that allow local communities to become immersed in the language renewal process: (1) dispelling myths about language learning and bilingualism; (2) identifying the values underlying the language; (3) recognizing beliefs associated with language use and bilingualism; (4) articulating the future desired by the community; (5) setting goals based on the desired future; (6) examining current community practices as they relate to the chosen goals; (7) establishing an information network to promote the goals; (8) recruiting individuals and groups to achieve the goals; (9) determining the key factors regarding language loss, maintenance, or renewal; (10) focusing on the unique functions of the local language; (11) developing language and educational policies; and, finally, (12) implementing a practical, comprehensive plan.

The Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) Roundtable on stabilizing indigenous languages that was held in November, 1994, in Flagstaff, Arizona, is a step toward helping tribes develop comprehensive plans for tribal language maintenance and renewal. The conference discussed rationale, policy, planning, research, community issues, and K-Adult education.

In the following sections we outline additional approaches that experience has shown can help turn the rhetoric of native-language renewal into actual programs in and out of school that will have an impact on the lives of children.

### **Early Childhood Programs**

As Fishman (1991) indicates, everything points to the need to focus efforts on getting parents and young children involved in native-language renewal. The intergenerational transmission of native languages in the home is the key to native-language survival. To the extent that there is a genetic predisposition to language, which may well include personal or cultural traits (shyness, for example), this predisposition can be strengthened both pre- and post-natally, primarily by the mother talking and singing often to the child in the native language, by exposing the child pre- and post-natally to frequent conversations held with others in the native language, and by participating as often as possible in community gatherings where the child can experience ethnic activities. Language nests can offer strong support to families in the effort to preserve native languages. Language nests were developed by the Maori of New Zealand to help preserve their culture and language. They are

community-based day-care centers staffed with Maori elders who speak to the children in the Maori language. Language nests preserve the Maori language that was dying out, provide a valuable service to working parents, and, most important, strengthen the cultural values associated with the traditional Maori extended family (Fleras, 1989).

Starting in 1982, Maori grandparents volunteered to run day-care centers featuring an immersion program in the Maori language. With grassroots support these "nests" expanded rapidly until in 1988 there were 521 centers with 8,000 children, 15% of the Maoris under 5 years old. In an informal, extended-family, childcare setting, Maori preschoolers are saturated with Maori language and culture (Fleras, 1989). Language renewal among adults is also being carried on in New Zealand through the use of week-long immersion classes at Maori cultural centers (Nicholson, 1990).

With university help, language nests are also being successfully pioneered in Hawaii with native Hawaiian children (Wilson, 1991). These programs link together elders and children, strengthen family values, and develop language skills. More consideration needs to be given to the strengths of the "language nest" approach in planning United States early childhood education programs. If we follow the advice of former secretary of education William Bennett (1987), to teach English to language-minority children "as quickly as possible," and by implication the culture that goes with the English language, we will further break down the American Indian cultures and family structures.

### **Elementary and Secondary Education**

Schools can build on the native-language skills that native families and language nests develop in children. An example of a school that is maintaining an Indian language is Rock Point Community School in Arizona. At Rock Point, reading and writing are taught first in Navajo. In kindergarten, two-thirds of the instruction is in Navajo with the rest of the time spent teaching students oral English. In grades 1-3, half the instruction is in English and half in Navajo. In the upper grades about one-fourth of the instruction is in Navajo with the rest in English. By teaching content-area subjects in the early grades in Navajo, Rock Point students are not held back in those subjects until they learn English. In the secondary school both 7th- and 8th-grade students have a full year of Navajo studies in Navajo plus a quarter of Navajo writing. In grades 9-12 students have a half year of Navajo studies in Navajo plus a quarter of Navajo writing each year (Reyhner, 1990).

Teachers at Rock Point have had to personally produce much of the material they use to teach in Navajo. A Title VII (bilingual education) funded Junior Research Program (JRP) in the elementary school and a Title V (Indian education) funded Applied Literacy Program (ALP) in the secondary school develop literacy skills in Navajo and English. Students write for newspapers and booklets that then become reading material for other students. In ALP students take Navajo writing, English writing, computer skills, and performance (speech and drama). Each quarter, an award-winning, bilingual school newspaper is produced. Hands-on instructional approaches are used because they lend themselves to adaptation by teachers for Navajo language instruction more readily than exclusively textbook approaches. McLaughlin (1990), in a study of literacy on the Navajo Reservation, found that three out of four of the community members questioned reported reading Navajo language articles in a school newspaper. The Navajo language is used as the language of instruction in the high-school Navajo social-studies classes. In addition to teaching tribal history, geography, and government, time is also spent on Navajo clanship where students learn how they are related to other Navajos and the duties they owe to their clan relatives. Thus, through the school's curriculum, community and family cohesiveness is reinforced. One of the important factors in the success of the Rock Point Community School curriculum is that students are encouraged and required to talk and write a lot in both Navajo and English.

Besides Navajo, the only other native language that is still used extensively over a wide area in the United States is Central Yup'ik Eskimo in Alaska. Some 22 widely-scattered villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta are served by the Lower Kuskokwim School District with offices in the city of Bethel. Bethel has 4000 inhabitants; the villages average 500 inhabitants. The language dominance of children entering school in these villages ranges from Yup'ik-only to English-only, with some of the villages in various stages of language transition.

Yup'ik is taught in all 22 village schools as well as the three schools in Bethel. Three different programs have been developed to respond to the children's broad-spectrum language needs. Four villages where the children are English-dominant teach Yup'ik for one period a day (Yup'ik as a Second Language Model). Four other villages, although Yup'ik-dominant, have adopted an all-English curriculum with Yup'ik used for half to one period a day (Bilingual/Bicultural Model). The remaining 14 Yup'ik-dominant villages provide all subject-matter instruction for Grades K-2 in Yup'ik, while English

instruction increases from 30 minutes a day in kindergarten to 90 minutes a day in Grade 2. Although English becomes the main language of instruction from Grade 3 on, instruction in Yup'ik is continued for one period a day (Yup'ik as a First Language Model).

The Yup'ik as a First Language Model is essentially the Primary Eskimo Program that was developed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the early 1970s when the village schools were run by the BIA. By 1979, at the end of a five-year study, the program evaluators concluded that "this bilingual program has demonstrated a level of effectiveness beyond most expectations and beyond the proven levels of achievement for the majority of bilingual programs of its type in the country (Tennant, 1979, p. 49). Although the program has weakened somewhat over the years owing to a high rate of teacher turnover in rural Alaska and the lack of intensive training that is required to maintain such a complex program, a comprehensive evaluation of the program in 1990 concluded that "the bilingual program of the Lower Kuskokwim School District, and its predecessor, the BIA Primary Eskimo Program, have already made great progress toward achieving equity and excellence in Yup'ik and English education (Henze, Regan, Vanett & Power, 1990, p. 82).

Unfortunately, beyond the few examples given above, there is little to give hope that American Indian communities and their languages will not continue to lose ground as reservations become less and less isolated from the dominant culture, particularly through the introduction of television to even the most remote areas. The Maori, Rock Point, and Yup'ik successes indicate that native-language-maintenance programs need to be given more attention by American Indian tribal governments and educators as a possible way to help implement the spirit of the Native American Languages Act.

### **College Efforts**

The tribal college movement began in 1968 with the founding of Navajo Community College. Since then this movement has grown until in 1994 the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) listed 31 members. Lionel Bordeaux, a long-time tribal college president and one of the leaders of the tribal college movement, noted that "cultural preservation is really the foundation of the tribal colleges" (1991, p. 12). Courses in tribal languages are a mainstay of tribal college curriculums.

Recently, Sinte Gleska University and Oglala Lakota College started four-year teacher education programs, and now Navajo Community College and Haskell Indian Junior College are developing four-year teacher-education programs. Except for Haskell, an intertribal college, tribal language and culture requirements are integral to these teacher education programs. In contrast to the old assimilationist approaches to Indian education, tribal colleges are formulating a multicultural/ecological educational approach. Oglala Lakota College's "Philosophical base of the teacher education program" states:

We believe that by learning a second way of life, without forsaking reverence due to one's primary group, personal understanding between individuals and cross-cultural understanding between groups will be enhanced. This approach to life needs to be integrated into all areas of education that affect Indian students on and near the reservation. (Oglala Lakota College, p. 1)

On the Rosebud Reservation, a Tribal Education Code was enacted in 1991 to get culturally-appropriate instruction for Lakota children (Knowles, Gill, Beauvais & Medearis, 1992).

The Vice President of Navajo Community college told a group of teachers in 1992:

We are developing the teacher education program within the natural education processes of the culture, and we wish to be respected as we observe the critical issues and power dealing with this type of development....

We believe that the knowledge of Navajo culture, language and S'a' ah Naagh'ai Bik'eh Hozh'o'on is necessary for anyone involved in the Teacher Education Program. We are attempting to set this development programmatically within our knowledge system so that it addresses real issues facing real people through a living curriculum and pedagogy....

Our traditional cultural roots are now being nourished and nurtured into full growth of amplifying our philosophy, S'a' ah Naagh'aa'i Bik'eh H'ozh'o'on through comprehensive curriculum and pedagogical transformation. (Lewis, 1992, pp. 1-2)

### **Classroom Suggestions**

Brandt and Ayoungman give practical advice on renewing aboriginal languages in their 1989 special theme issue, "Language is a Gift from the Creator," of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, which focuses on language renewal. They warn parents and educators not to "teach" their children 'Indian' by giving them isolated words such as the names of foods, colors, or numbers." Instead they recommend that family members simply talk to their children

all the time in the language... using the normal strategies of talking to children, asking them questions, telling them what to say in natural functional situations, such as "Ask your grandma to give you some food," or expanding their productions. (1989, p. 45)

Hinton (1990/91) emphasizes the amount of time that adults wanting to learn their ancestral language must spend and the need adults have to overcome inhibitions about making mistakes and playing with language. She also emphasizes that one need not study the grammar of an Indian language to learn it and that immersion rather than translation is the best way to learn an Indian language.

Teachers seeking ideas on how to restore native languages or to teach English as a Second Language would do well to study Krashen and Terrell's (1983) "Natural Approach" to language acquisition because the translation approaches used in the past have shown little success. In addition, the ideas in the second edition of John Oller, Jr.'s *Methods That Work* (1993) are excellent. Oller's edited book includes chapters by Krashen and other leaders in the field of language education.

The "Natural Approach" incorporates language-teaching principles that have proven successful in other methodologies as well. Lozanov's Suggestopedic Approach to language learning, for example, has gained worldwide attention for both its success and its novel departure from the cognitive emphasis in most classrooms (Lozanov, 1978; Lozanov & Gateva, 1988; Stevick, 1980). The Berlitz "Method," with its demonstrated commercial success on an international scale, is another proven approach to language teaching. The "Method" used to teach any of the languages offered by Berlitz schools is not published but is taught privately to the instructors who will teach students one-on-one or in small groups. So effective is the

Method that the only prerequisites to becoming a Berlitz teacher are that (1) the language to be taught must be the teacher's mother tongue, and (2) the teacher must have completed an elementary school education in that mother tongue.

The Method is based on a cycle of statements and questions that always rotate around three objects, statements, or situations. The real or realistic content of the questions keeps the student(s) focused, and the use of three distinct contexts keeps the student(s) from parroting responses. The learning cycle begins with three statements that in the beginning may focus on three simple, real objects: paper, pencil, book. The questioning then rotates from negative to positive responses and then back to statements (Pencil? No. Book? No. Paper? Yes.). In short order, the cycle of statements and questions becomes quite complex (Is Mr. Berlitz going to London? No. Mr. Berlitz is not going to London. Is Mr. Berlitz going to Paris? No. Mr. Berlitz is not going to Paris. Where is Mr. Berlitz going? Mr. Berlitz is going to Rome... Is Mrs. Berlitz going to Rome? No.... Is Miss Berlitz going to London? and so forth). In a Berlitz language lesson, consequently, the teacher models the target language half the time by asking questions and the student(s) spend the other half of the class time answering the questions in the target language. For the first 30 lessons, students rely totally on oral instruction by modeling the teacher's pronunciation of the target language. Although Berlitz language classes are intense, partly because they are expensive, they teach language well and they teach it fast. The intensity of the Berlitz Method perhaps cannot be maintained in educational settings with large numbers of students, but many of the valuable principles that make the Method work can be built into any effective language-teaching program.

The use in classrooms of cooperative-learning techniques where the students question each other is another way of increasing the amount of time students speak the target language. In mixed classrooms where different students are fluent in different languages, this peer tutoring could be very effective.

Although they may motivate students differently, the Krashen, Lozanov, and Berlitz approaches to language teaching incorporate five principles that need to be addressed, with varying degrees of emphasis, in any language-teaching program:

1. Putting primary emphasis on *communication*, not grammar
2. Using *context* that is real or at least realistic



3. Processing *content* of high interest to the learner
4. Adjusting the pace of instruction to the students' progress
  - moving from simple to complex (generally speaking)
  - emphasizing speaking over speaking correctly
  - putting comprehension before completion
5. Correcting students through modeling

Since learning styles vary across cultures and even among individuals within those cultures, it would be simplistic to conclude that any one method "fits all." But all three approaches mentioned above have been proven to be widely successful in their own contexts and with their own emphases. Consequently, familiarity with the principles that have made these approaches successful will increase the likelihood of maintaining and renewing native languages.

By not focusing on grammar or vocabulary, such as conjugating verbs or memorizing the names of numbers, colors, and animals, students acquire language skills they can use immediately. The timely, positive feedback that students gain from early, successful use of the new language boosts their desire to learn. The judicious teaching of grammar, however, can be helpful. The contributors to Ronald M. Barasch and C. Vaughn James's book *Beyond the Monitor Model* (1994) note, examining especially European sources, that what is good teaching in the Natural Approach is not new with Krashen, and they comment on what Waldemar Marton refers to as the "anti-pedagogical" aspects of Krashen's theories. Like the Whole Language Approach, Krashen talks more about creating an "acquisition" environment rather than specific teaching strategies. Wilga Rivers recommends a more "interactive approach" where, besides providing comprehensible input in a low anxiety environment, teachers also correct grammar based on the level of the students understanding.

As Ian Dunlop, another contributor, puts it, "explanations of grammar help as long as those explanations are understandable, do explain and do not confuse, and are at the linguistic level of the student" (Barasch & James, 1994, p. 217). Without that explanation there is evidence that students' errors will "fossilize" with the result that while they will be able to get by in the language, they will never achieve near-native fluency. As stated by Carlos Yorio, "What the immersion program evidence shows is that in the best of all possible acquisition-oriented classroom situations, comprehensible input and full emphasis on meaning result in fluency but not in accuracy" (Barasch & James,

1994, p. 132). There is some evidence of this from the Canadian French immersion classrooms.

Teresa Pica, Richard Young, and Catherine Doughty also note the importance of interaction plus "redundancy in input" in second language instruction. Pica notes that "a number of studies have shown that *a priori* adjustments to input in the form of paraphrase and repetition of linguistic constituents, simpler syntax, and commonly-used words have a facilitating effect on L2 comprehension of texts or lecturettes [mini-lesson], compared to their unadjusted counterparts" (Barasch & James, 1994, p. 183). She also states that students need more "opportunities to initiate interaction, seek clarification [ask questions], or signal for help with comprehension" (Barasch & James, 1994, p. 185). Peter af Trampe argues that some of Krashen's dislike of grammars results from their written-language bias. The last thing beginning language users can use is a complicated grammar produced by linguists, but they can use simplified oral-language-oriented grammar.

We mentioned previously the parallels between Krashen's Natural Approach and the Whole Language Approach to literacy. They both downplay direct instruction in favor of providing a language rich environment that will motivate students. While this fits in with some of the recent research in cognitive psychology and the constructivist theory of learning, taken to the extreme it severely limits the role of teachers. Basically, teachers would only provide high-interest, low-anxiety, language-rich environments for students. The more conservative approach advocated by the contributors to *Beyond the Monitor Model* adds a valuable teaching function to this environment.

### **Curriculum and Materials Development in the Schools**

Although the school alone cannot revive or maintain a language - that is primarily a prerogative of the family and the speech community - the school can be a force and a focal point for language maintenance or renewal. Since the school teaches subject matter in a well-planned, methodical, and regularly-scheduled way, it can strongly reinforce a community's efforts to promote native-language use. Furthermore, when a local language is taught alongside other formal school subjects, it takes on an importance equal to those other subjects. This message to the students may be subliminal, but it is, nonetheless, an important one.

For a language to be taught effectively in the school, more than a methodology is needed. The way the language will be taught must be mapped

out concretely in a curriculum or course of study. This curriculum, in turn, must be supported by appropriate materials. What specific curriculum and materials evolve for a particular program depends on a number of factors that must be reviewed, discussed and decided upon by the local community working with principals, teachers, and bilingual aides (see Brandt and Ayoungman's Exercises for Language Planning outlined earlier). This process can be accelerated with the help of a facilitator who has wide experience with many different kinds of native-language programs.

From this careful planning, an ideal language-teaching model can emerge. This "showroom" model may never be driven off the dealer's lot, because there always seems to be some gap between the ideal and the affordable. Cost notwithstanding, however, it is still important to begin with the ideal program because this will allow the planning group to prioritize the scope of the program within whatever funding can be allotted to it. Very often supplemental federal funds can be gotten to help establish a language-teaching program. Here again, it is helpful for the committee to consult with someone who knows what funds are available and how to apply for them. For any effort to be successful, however, it cannot depend entirely on discretionary federal funding such as Title VII. A commitment of regular school-budget dollars must be made to achieve program permanence. Bilingual education, once implemented, does not need to be appreciably more expensive than monolingual education. It does, however, require that a substantial number of certified teachers need to be bilingual and have special training in teaching languages.

One of the important decisions that often needs to be made in native-language programs is whether to focus solely on speaking skills or to include literacy. If we assume literacy to mean more than merely some written aid to learning the language itself, we consequently assume the need for a viable orthography, that is, a writing system designed with the user rather than the scholar in mind and based, at least for the most part, on the Roman alphabet that everyone learns in school. More even than a practical orthography, literacy assumes literature. Including literacy as a language-teaching goal assumes a commitment to develop reading material for children and adults in the target language. Literacy is an admirable goal: it involves local speakers in developing written materials; it documents for future generations the language and the knowledge the language conveys; it provides the community with a sense of pride in their people and their language; and, at the same time, it gives the student a powerful language learning tool.

An example of a successfully-implemented language-maintenance program can be found on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Strait, some 150 miles off the west coast of Alaska, but only 40 miles from the Siberian mainland. This large, windswept, treeless island is home to two Eskimo villages of about 600 people each: Gambell and Savoonga. Both villages have schools with grades K-12 run by the Bering Strait School District. The dominant language of the school-entry children in these two villages is Siberian Yupik (Note: Central Yup'iks use an apostrophe to indicate a glottal stop in the word "Yup'ik;" St. Lawrence Islanders do not). This is one of four Eskimo languages in Alaska and it is spoken only on this island and on the nearby coast of Siberia. In recent years the inhabitants of the island have begun to call their language St. Lawrence Island Yupik rather than Siberian Yupik.

Because the children's first language is Yupik, every classroom K-8 has a Yupik-speaking aide. In addition to team teaching with the certified teacher, there was a long tradition that the aide in each classroom would teach 30-45 minutes a day in Yupik. Since there was no scope or sequence for the Yupik instruction, no teacher knew what any other teacher had taught. As a result, the children each year learned more than they ever wanted to know about a favorite cultural topic: seals. In order to improve the language-teaching program, the school district in 1983 sought the help of a consultant to work with the school staff.

A needs assessment indicated that ideally the children should be taught in Yupik for the first few years in school, while they learned English as a second language gradually in a non-traumatic way. Ideally, they needed a program similar to the Yup'ik as a First Language model in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta. With only 300 students on the island, however, compared to 3000 in the Lower Kuskokwim School District, the ideal program gave way to fiscal reality. Consequently, the time frame for the language program remained the same: 30-45 minutes of instruction a day. With the help of an initial Title VII bilingual education grant, the school district developed a K-12 scope and sequence for the cultural content of the classes taught in Yupik, created a Yupik reading program, consolidated existing reading materials for the elementary level, and created three hard-cover volumes of local history and lore in both Yupik and English for high school students. A current Title VII grant is allowing the local materials development center staff to develop five full-length readers in Yupik and English for use in grades 4-8.

This program in the school is thus helping the community to maintain the language through a strong literacy program and helping to counteract the ever-mounting influence of English-language television in nearly every home.

### **Other Considerations**

While it is natural to go to tribal elders for help in learning and teaching tribal languages, it is really young parents who can create the home environment for the intergenerational transmission of tribal languages. In addition, when young people are recruited to become actively involved in native-language maintenance and renewal, there is an expectation that this interest can bear fruit for another half century, long after today's elders are gone.

Using tribal elders and other native speakers to actually teach tribal language in schools has a history going back at least to the early seventies. This history indicates that while these acknowledged experts can teach language in an informal situation-at home, in early-child-care settings, and on field trips-teaching language in a school classroom is another thing altogether. Teaching to relatively large groups of children in classroom settings requires knowledge of how to motivate and keep discipline as well as the knowledge of the second-language-teaching techniques of Krashen and others discussed above. Tribal members, however, often meet this advice with skepticism.

Among Indians there is a history of suspicion of non-Indian, native-language efforts based on the history of native-language use by non-Indians. Missionaries learned the language and developed writing systems for the purpose of spreading Christianity, not preserving Indian languages. Anthropologists and linguists studied tribal languages for purely academic and professional reasons that had little or no benefit to Indian people. Government officials sometimes became interested in tribal languages so that they could be used to sell to the people unpopular government policies such as stock reduction on the Navajo reservation in the 1930s.

Any outsiders seeking to offer advice or help to maintain native languages need to be aware that their efforts will not be met uncritically. What is needed is a partnership of what Watahomigie and Yamamoto (1987) have described as action linguists working with curriculum developers, tribal elders, tribal young adults, and teachers.

Native language and cultural revival will not be accomplished by tribal officials and school administrators going to Washington to testify for various bills. In fact, their failure to "mind the store" back home can further discredit Indian education. What is needed is the aforementioned partnership with curriculum and language experts to develop high quality classroom teaching methods and materials. Otherwise, "native-language experts" and local certified teachers who speak the language who go into the classroom with high expectations put on them by the community will be struggling against odds that for most will be insurmountable. The result will be that students will learn neither native languages nor the three "Rs" well.

### **Conclusion**

If community-based, native-language, early-childhood programs can be developed and linked to two-way or maintenance bilingual programs in public and BIA funded schools, there is hope that American Indian families can be strengthened and native languages can be revived and maintained while English-language skills are developed. Indian students need an environment both inside and outside of school where they can develop and use native and English-language skills. The home is an obvious place to use the native language, but some tribes have also started radio and television stations with native language programming. While students need environments where they can use English in conversation, they need to be taught that it is not necessary to give up a tribal language for English. It is not only all right to be bilingual, but it is better than being monolingual. A shift in language education policy over the past quarter century has helped promote this message. The message has come at a critical juncture for the maintenance or renewal of many American Indian and Alaska native languages.

### **Editor's Note**

This article is an extension of a paper that was presented by Jon Reyhner at Lake Superior State University's Native American Studies Conference in 1991 and was published in the proceedings of that conference the following year. The section on Fishman's work is adapted from Reyhner (1992), and the critique of Krashen's work is condensed from Reyhner (1993b).

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